ED 155 946 TECHNIQUES FOR INTRODUCING THE NEWSPAPER TO ESL STUDENTS. TEAL OCCASIONAL PAPERS, VOL. 2, 1978.

1 OF 1 BENETTI, JEAN BRITISH COLUMBIA ASSOCIATION OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH AS AN ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE, VANCOUVER. 78 10P.

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 155 946 FL 009 568

AUTHOR Benetti, Jean
TITLE Techniques for Introducing the Newspaper to ESL Students. TEAL Occasional Papers, Vol. 2, 1978.
INSTITUTION British Columbia Association of Teachers of English as an Additional Language, Vancouver.
PUB DATE 78
NOTE 10p.
AVAILABLE FROM Maureen C. Sawkins, British Columbia Association of TEAL, c/o King Edward Campus, V.C.C., 2750 Oak St., Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada ($2.50 Canadian plus $.50 postage)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adult Education; *English (Second Language); *Language Instruction; *Learning Activities; *Newspapers; Pictorial Stimuli; Reading Assignments; Reading Instruction; *Reading Materials; Second Language Learning; *Teaching Methods

ABSTRACT

Newspapers are practical sources of materials to help students of English as a second language (ESL) reach some degree of reading competency. Nine objectives for using the newspaper with ESL students are presented, and teaching procedures and techniques that can be used in the classroom are described. For example, newspaper pictures can be used for students in groups of two and for class or group activities. A more difficult assignment is the study of the headline story of a particular edition on the weekend. Advantages of using the newspaper include the interest level of current events and the abundance of inexpensive, complicated material. (SW)

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TECHNIQUES FOR INTRODUCING THE NEWSPAPER TO ESL STUDENTS

JEAN BENETTI

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Literacy is of more value than all the riches in the world, therefore, encouraging people to read in their native language is one way of promoting and maintaining such a populace. As E.S.L. teachers we must not hesitate to tell our students to read, read, and read, no matter what, nor in what language. It will be a long time before we can expect second language learners to read with the same competency in English and it is quite possible that an equivalent level may never be attained.

As second language teachers we are being challenged to help our students reach some degree of competency in second language reading. The most practical sources of materials to help us develop the students' reading competency are the newspapers and magazines.

We are being very realistic when we turn to the use of newspapers because only a small percentage of our adult ESL students proceed to higher education and the use of formal textbooks. They need techniques to obtain information from readily accessible sources for their daily lives and those of their immediate family.

The majority of our students have already been subscribers to the newspapers (often more sophisticated than our local ones) in their native country. They shy away from our English newspapers because they realize the subtle nuances that can be conveyed in many of the articles.

Therefore, we need not only give them techniques for understanding but also directions in selecting articles with which they will have success. Our problem is how to approach the use of such an abundance of inexpensive, current, and yet complicated material.

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Early in the ESL programme, we should draw our students away from the almost exclusive presentation of simple sentences and introduce them to compound and complex ones in dialogues and short stories. If we want our students to develop listening comprehension we should read to them everyday, using materials which have the desired structure.

Students need to discover that the techniques that they use when reading in their native language can also be used when they read English. In addition, of course, we must give them guidelines and specific tasks to carry out so that they can cope with the process of reading.

My immediate objectives for using the newspaper with ESL students are the following:

1.) That given practice in looking at a newspaper picture with a peer each student will be able to ask and answer information or "wh" questions about it.

2.) That given practice in looking at and discussing the various newspaper pictures the student will learn to make inferences, give interpretations, and evaluations of the various situations.

3.) That given practice in asking the information questions about an unseen newspaper picture the students will be able to elicit enough information from their peers in order to enable them to write a sentence about it.

4.) That given practice in listening to the teacher read short relevant articles from the newspaper, the students will be able to answer the information questions about them.

5.) That given the article to read silently they will learn to guess the meaning of new words from the context rather than from the dictionary.

6.) That after having read and discussed the article, the students will be able to write a one-sentence summary incorporating as many of the information questions as possible.

7.) That given practice in both newspaper picture and article activities, the students will learn about the culture and geography of Canada.

8.) That given an opportunity to see timely pictures and read timely articles, the students will be able to keep abreast with major municipal, provincial, national and international events.

9.) That given an opportunity of using the newspaper in class with guidelines, the student will experience success in the activities and thus be encouraged to purchase at least one copy per week and then eventually subscribe to it.

The following presentation is intended to be an outline of procedures and techniques that a teacher can use in his/her classroom.

The teacher can ask for the names of wealthy people in the students' countries and for the kinds of people they usually employ. The following list is most likely to ensue: cooks, maids, gardeners, chauffers, baby-sitters, nurses, valets, etc. One should then elicit the synonym servant.

One can proceed to tell them that although people may not be wealthy enough to have servants nor that it may be customary for them in their country to have servants, all do, in fact have servants. Someone will justifiably volunteer that our eyes, ears, nose, mouth, and skin are servants -- which is a good answer. Extend the discussion. Tell them that no matter what language one speaks each person has six language servants. In one way or another the idea of question words will emerge.

The following poem is appropriate at this time:

My Six Servants

I keep six honest serving men
They taught me all I knew
Their names are What and Why and When
And How and Where and Who.

Rudyard Kipling

One can change the verb tense to that of the present to make the poem more relevant.

Elicit examples of questions and answers that people ask at home, at school, on the job, in an office, in a store, or when they read their ethnic paper. Summarize by saying that all of us are wealthy, indeed, because we have language servants who are ready to work for us. It is up to us to make them work for us and that is precisely what we are going to do.

A second short lesson is also of value in preparation in the use of the newspaper. Have the students look at the printing date of a textbook or dictionary and introduce them to the idiom "out of date". Then ask them for an example of some reading material that is as "up to date" as possible. The students will give the answer you want which is "the newspaper".

Everyone will agree that it is best to use the up to date and the relatively inexpensive newspaper but he or she will protest against its general use because of its difficulty. However, there will be a concensus in that the easiest thing to look at in the newspaper are the pictures. Therefore start with the newspaper pictures.

A. Newspaper Pictures

Before having the students begin an exercise using newspaper pictures, list the question words on the board from easy to difficult:

Who/What/Where/When/Why/How

If a newspaper is not available for your daily use at school, be prepared to have your daily newspaper "cut-up". Scan the newspaper daily and clip out pictures and captions which you think your class can manage. Cut off the captions and save them for the second part of the activity.

I - Couple Activities

1.) Have every second student select a picture at random.

Then in couples the students are to ask each other the "wh" questions about the picture. The teacher should move from couple to couple giving help only after the students have tried to get it from someone else in the class. Encourage guessing for the why and how questions. (Kenneth Goodman says that reading is a "psycholinguistic guessing game".) Encourage the students to make inferences, critical judgements and evaluations about the pictures.

The teacher and students soon learn that each of the question words can lead to a variety of questions. In the beginning it is important, then, to have a specific set of general questions so that the students will experience success in doing the activity.

The following chart is offered as a guide.

<table>
<tr><td colspan="7">Start</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="7">What or Who
Inanimate is the picture about? Animate</td></tr>
<tr><td>What</td><td>happened</td><td rowspan="2">What

Where

When
Why
How</td><td rowspan="2">is

are</td><td rowspan="2">he

she
it
they</td><td rowspan="2">doing?</td><td rowspan="2">

that?</td></tr>
<tr><td>Where

When
Why
How</td><td>did it happen?</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="7">Summary Sentence</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="7">When What Where How Why
Who</td></tr>
</table>

2.) Have each couple give an oral report in the form of one sentence summary about the picture.

3.) a. Have one from each couple find the caption (which the teacher has put on her desk) that belongs to the picture.

b. Have each couple make a comparison (same/different) with their ideas about the picture. Again, first encourage them to get help from their peers regarding vocabulary in the caption. If the teacher has guided each couple in the questions asked by the students, they will experience success in the exercise.

c. Take time to study one or two useful idioms etc. that no doubt have come up in the captions.

II - Class or Group Activities

1. Have about four newspaper pictures minus the captions.
2. Have a group of three students select a single picture and be prepared to answer the "wh" questions from the entire class. (They are not td show the picture.)
3. Repeat with about three pictures. (Or this can be done simultaneously at five or six tables.)
4. After the third picture presentation each couple is asked to write a summary sentence on the board about one of the pictures discussed other than their own. (This activity compels students to listen to others.)
5. The class reads and corrects the sentences on the board.
6. The final activity can be caption matching and a comparison with the sentence summaries.

It is not surprising to discover how unsatisfied students become with their production of simple sentences. In time, and after some practice one will find them combining and expanding sentences to form compound and complex ones. The teacher can also extend the grammar lesson of the day by specifying whether he/she would like the students to make use of the structures that are currently being studied.

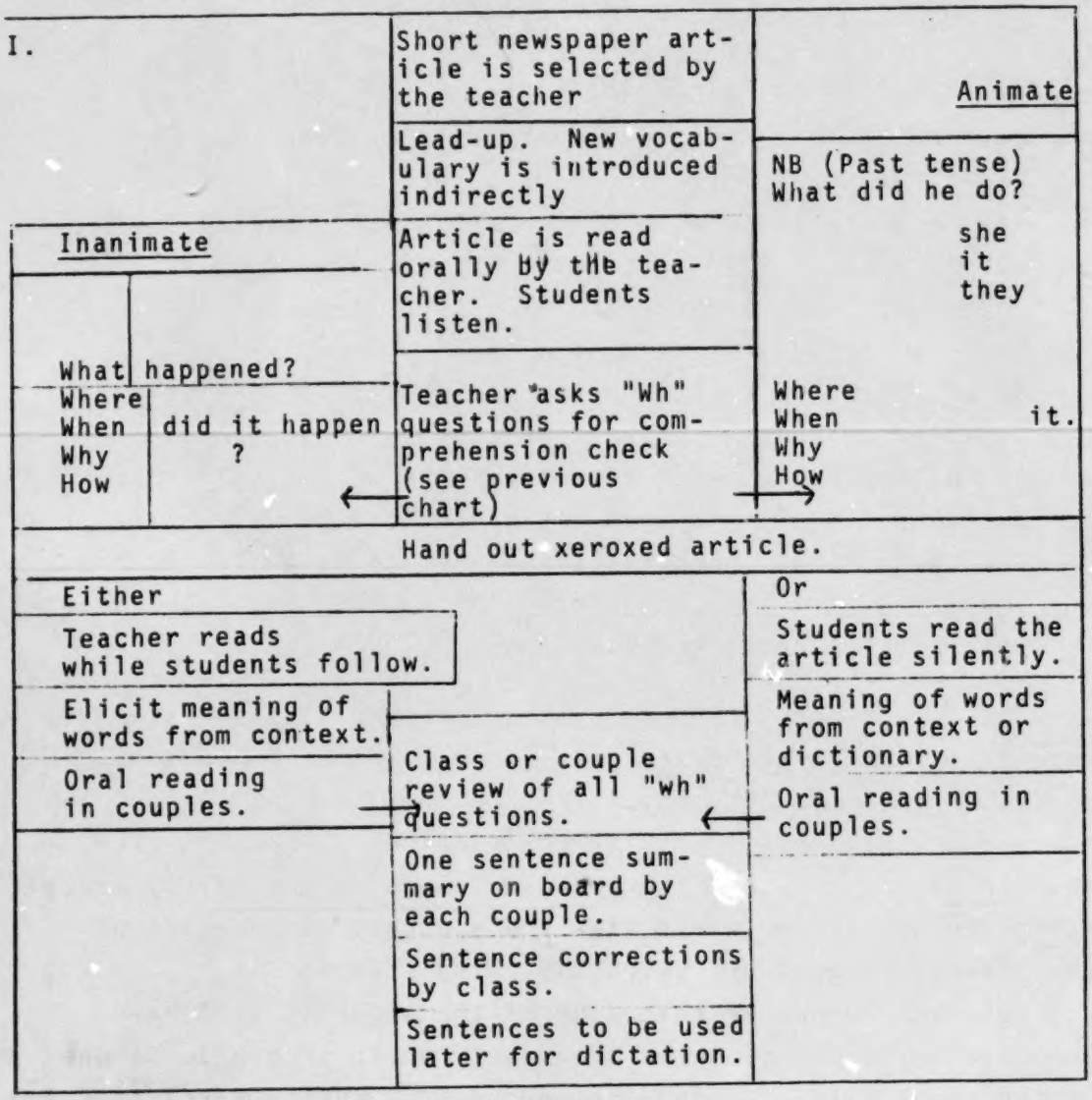
One will discover that some of the students will have seen the newspaper pictures previously which of course is one of the objectives of using the newspaper. Furthermore, it will be noted that the more familiar the students are with the

topic the more knowledgeable the questions and answers will be.

B. Newspaper Articles

A similar exercise can be done by using short, timely newspaper articles.

The following order of presentation is suggested because it encourages more oral discussion:



II. The following is an exercise with less control:

Step 1. Students are given one page of the newspaper and are asked to select an article in one of the following categories: Local/ provincial/national/international.

Step 2. Silent reading in couples
1st paragraph
1st sentence of subsequent paragraphs. Last paragraph.

Step 3. Put the following outline on the board. (Short answers except for sentence summary.)

Who
What
Where
When
Why
How

1 sentence summary.

2 or 3 new vocabulary items.

Step 4. Couple discussion and board work.

Step 5. Couples read one another's summaries and ask for further explanations or clarification.

Step 6. Class as a whole discusses and corrects one or two.

Step 7. New vocabulary is collected for word study and then used for weekly quiz.

Step 8. Sentence summaries provide material for dictation.

It is obvious that one cannot cut out pictures and short articles and still have complete pages of the newspaper for the previous mentioned exercise. It is therefore necessary that the teacher plan his/her work carefully. One suggestion is to collect all newspaper pages after use and use them for your picture and short article source. Better still, buy two

newspapers!

III. A third and more difficult exercise with the least amount of teacher control, which is of course our goal, is to assign the headline story of a particular edition on the weekend. In order to make the work a little easier it would be advisable to have a mimeographed sheet with the question format used on the board as shown in the previous activity. Such a sheet would make it easier for the students to discuss the story in class on the following day. Teachers should discourage students from copying, which is often the case when an exercise is assigned as homework. It is interesting to note that such an assignment leads to telephone communication amongst the students in order to get confirmation of headline stories if a particular edition is not available.

The above activities have been carried out successfully during the past year with classes in the Upper Beginners, the Intermediate and the Advanced levels. More experimentation and practice is needed in order to refine the techniques of developing the information questions.

It is interesting to note that after one experiences teaching with current materials it is rather dull and uninteresting to return to stereotyped and lock-step material. Once successfully introduced to the daily newspaper, students need little or no motivation to continue on their own.

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